

VZCZCXRO5974  
RR RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHIHL #0146/01 2841538  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 111538Z OCT 06  
FM REO HILLAH  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0719  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0706  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RUEHIHL/REO HILLAH 0773

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000146

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: BABIL GOVERNOR PLAYING A NEW GAME OR JUST BLUFFING?

REF: A) HILLAH 86 B) HILLAH 103 C) HILLAH 117 D) HILLAH 128

HILLAH 00000146 001.2 OF 002

CLASSIFIED BY: Charles Hunter, Regional Coordinator, REO Hillah,  
State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The governor of Babil province has shown uncharacteristic willingness to engage with the Regional Embassy Office (REO) during the month of Ramadan, chairing a lengthy meeting to discuss projects, attending the REO's iftar and meeting with REO representatives at his office. Though skeptical of any permanent change away from his more usual prickly - if not downright anti-American - attitude, REO staff will continue seeking opportunities to engage him, especially on governance and security issues. End summary.

¶2. (C) During a little more than eighteen months in office, the governor of Babil province, Salem Saleh Mehdi Al-Muslimawi, has generally kept his distance from USG representatives. A major irritant in the relationship has been his repeated attempts with the provincial council to oust pro-U.S. Babil police chief MG Qais Hamza Abboud Al-Ma'mouri (reftels), who has made himself a target by refusing to bow to partisan or sectarian pressures in doing his job. Typically the governor has sent his deputy to events or meetings hosted by the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) or the REO. When he has shown up himself, he has not been above leaving abruptly to mark his disdain for the Americans "occupying his province."

-----  
TURNING UP FOR EVENTS  
-----

¶3. (C) Since the start of Ramadan, however, the governor has seemed more willing to spend time with USG officials. (Note: Shortly before the start of Ramadan, Al-Muslimawi also attended a joint security meeting in Baghdad with MND-B MG Thurman for the first time in several months. End note.) He arrived a few minutes late but stayed for and led the entire three-hour meeting of the Sept. 27 Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee, a group he nominally chairs. Unlike on previous occasions, and despite being only a few days into the month of fasting, he actively participated in the discussion, demonstrated interest in all parts of the province and pledged his assistance to several key programs. A week later he arrived on time with the Provincial Council Chairman and other notables to take part in breaking the fast at REO al-Hillah's annual iftar. After standing next to the Regional Coordinator (RC) throughout the meal, he and the RC walked side by side to wash their hands and begin socializing with other guests. Later that week at the REO's weekly security coordination meeting, the deputy governor expressed the governor's compliments and

appreciation for the iftar invitation.

-----  
MEETING WITH RC  
-----

¶4. (C) On Oct. 9 Governor Al-Muslimawi met with the RC for over an hour at the governorate building. Asked for his views on the province's security and the main threats thereto, Al-Muslimawi initially spoke in general terms of how Iraq's security is a fight not merely against a particular group or cell but also against terrorism affecting all parts of the world. After a brief -- and not noticeably heartfelt -- paean to American sacrifices for the sake of his country's protection and freedom, he asserted that troubles in Babil are not inherently confessional, given the province's mixed Sunni and Shi'a population, but rather are due to foreign infiltrators who fuel tensions between the two groups in a style "reminiscent of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi."

¶5. (C) The current security challenges require five lines of response, he contended, stressing that this objective could be accomplished only through a combined effort with his "American friends." His priorities comprised the following:  
-- increased citizen awareness of the gravity of the security issue. The governor stated that he recently hosted a conference at his home, attended by over 200 imams and tribal leaders, to discuss the present situation and said that he planned another conference later in the week. (Comment: The "conference" apparently was nothing more than an annual "haflat 'aza," held at the house of the governor's father, the sheikh of the Bani Musalim clan in Kifl, to mark the death of one of the twelve Shi'a imams. End comment.)  
-- working closely with American forces to prevent any further growth of negative influences from abroad; here he noted his desire for the RC to have a "fruitful" and "beneficial" time in Hillah by taking a major role in such coordination.  
-- effectively training the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)  
-- equipping the ISF with adequate weaponry to combat the

HILLAH 00000146 002.2 OF 002

terrorists

-- increasing the number of ISF under the theory that "Iraqis should be everywhere that the 'problem' exists."

¶6. (C) The RC responded that it would be important for the governor to be a leader in speaking out publicly against militias and violence and praising honest, professional work by the ISF. Also vital is to ensure that sufficient numbers of Sunnis are recruited into the police force and trained. Al-Muslimawi impassively heard out specific requests on security for the central Babil courthouse and a water pipe repair effort, faintly nodding assent to look into them. At this point the day's fast was clearly taking its toll, but the governor expressed at least grudging interest in the idea of creating a provincial solid waste management program based on a municipal plan just getting started in Al-Hillah. He also made mention of his recent trip to Pakistan in search of foreign investment and said that he would travel for the same purpose to Iran, Kuwait and South Korea following the 'Eid Al-Fitr. (Note: His discussions in Pakistan seem to have focused on the manufacture of water and sewer pipes, and he stated that a delegation from Pakistan is visiting Al-Hillah this week. End note.)

-----  
COMMENT  
-----

¶7. (C) The governor is unlikely to have changed his spots completely. A REO local national who attended the Oct. 9 meeting and has extensive experience with Al-Muslimawi judged the latter's comportment "fake," with the real one being critical of the U.S. to the point of rudeness. Be that as it may, the REO will stay engaged with him regularly on policy and programmatic matters. The next Babil PRDC, scheduled for October 25, will be an indication of whether the governor's

seeming openness during Ramadan will extend beyond the end of that "generous" month. End comment.

-----  
BIO NOTE  
-----

18. (C) Prior to becoming the Governor of Babil in March 2005, Salem Saleh Medhi Al-Muslimawi served as the senior Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) representative in Babil. Born in 1957 in Kifl, in the province's southwest corner, he fled to Iran under Saddam's regime and lived there for 22 years. He speaks fluent Farsi, is married to an Iranian national and has six children (five boys and a girl) ranging in age from mid-twenties to five years old. He claims to have received a degree in Islamic Theology from the International Islamic School in Iran in 2002. In reality he did not complete elementary school and for this reason is widely viewed as unqualified for his current position. Probably out of embarrassment over his limited schooling, he does not share many Iraqis' habit of inquiring about an interlocutor's education.  
HUNTER